

Staff Report - Agenda Item 5C

General Plan Amendment Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park

I. DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDATION

California State Parks recommends the Commission adopt a resolution to amend the 1979 General Plan for Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park (SHP). This amendment removes modification #4 of the 1979 general plan which specifically states: "Public money shall not be expended on the relocation of Sutter's Mill." The modification was part of the Commission's Resolution 23-79 (Attachment A) adopting the 1979 general plan.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION & BACKGROUND

Marshall Gold Discovery SHP is located at the site of Sutter's Mill in Coloma in El Dorado County, about 40 miles northeast of Sacramento. It preserves the site where James Marshall discovered gold in the tailrace of John Sutter's saw mill, setting off the California Gold Rush. Acquisition of the park began in 1942 with the purchase of a small piece of property to preserve the gold discovery site. The purpose of Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park is to "secure to the people and to make available for their observation, inspiration, and enjoyment, the gold discovery site and its environs as an accurate portrayal of the story that unfolded at the time of the discovery and during the ensuing Gold Rush, primarily embracing the period from 1847 through 1852." The SHP's general plan was adopted in 1979.

The 1979 general plan recommends giving the SHP a greater sense of historical significance by returning the site to "the way it appeared between 1847 and 1852." One way the early historic setting would be recreated, the plan proposes, would be to relocate the replica of Sutter's Mill from its current location near an SHP parking lot, where appreciation and interpretation of the gold discovery site and mill is difficult, to its original location on the American River. At the time, the relocation was envisioned as including a complete realignment of the American River back to its historic position, stabilization of the river bank, excavation and removal of the original historic mill timbers from the river, restoration of the mill tailrace and a complete reconstruction of Sutter's Mill in the river. This ambitious proposal became a focal point of the Commission's review of the plan. In 1979 the existing mill replica was only eleven years old and in good repair, and the potential expense and complexity of the extensive relocation project then envisioned was obvious. The Commission expressed concern about the mill relocation project with a resolution which includes a modification to the general plan that states: "Public money shall not be expended on the relocation of Sutter's Mill." (see Attachment B of this staff report).

In 2009, thirty years later, the mill replica is dilapidated, unsafe for demonstrations or access by the public, and near the end of its useful life. A design analysis of the mill concluded that it would be desirable to reconstruct the mill closer to its historic location near the gold discovery site to maximize public appreciation of the gold discovery site and to improve interpretation. As envisioned now, however, a new mill replica would be constructed not in the river as specified in 1979, but on higher ground adjacent to the river near the gold discovery site. The old replica would be removed and the site restored to a natural condition.

In order to allow this reconstruction, an amendment of the plan is needed to remove the modification prohibiting the use of public money to relocate Sutter's Mill. This amendment would allow State Parks to use bond funds available from Proposition 84 for the project.

III. PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS

The State Park and Recreation Commission officially named and classified the property as Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park in 1962. The general plan was approved by the Commission in April 1979.

IV. PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

In March 2009, Gold Fields District staff conducted a public meeting on the subject of the sawmill construction project. The project received strong support from the local community and those interested in the park's historic site and interpretation programs. Public comments indicated that the new proposal to relocate the mill fulfilled the original intent of the 1979 general plan.

V. ISSUES AND ANALYSIS

Sutter's Mill and Gold Discovery Area:

The current Sutter's Mill replica was constructed in 1968 and is in a state of disrepair. It is no longer structurally sound and the working sawmill mechanisms are inoperable. It sits several hundred yards away from the Gold Discovery Monument and has no physical connection with the gold discovery site. While the mill still attracts park visitors, there is no connection to the other historic locations in the park, and visitors are actually drawn away from the park's primary areas of significance. Most park visitors never actually see the gold discovery site.

State Parks has identified the Sutter's Mill reconstruction project as "high priority." One of the primary goals of the project is to reconstruct Sutter's Mill on higher ground near the American River, so that the mill will be highlighted and draw park visitors to the monument and gold discovery site. Features of the reconstructed mill replica can emulate the original mill races and other features without requiring the complex and expensive river relocation, channel stabilization, and flumes envisioned in 1979.

The project will meet the directives of the 1979 general plan by using the relocated mill replica to draw park visitors to the Gold Discovery Monument and the original mill tailrace location. These are sites of historic significance that should be featured in the park; emphasizing these features would allow the park to be "...expanded to provide the observer a clear picture of the way the areas appeared during the time of gold discovery." If the proposed general plan amendment is not approved, replacement of the existing mill replica would still be needed, as it is essential to appreciating and interpreting gold discovery, but it would need to occur at its present location with its impediments to interpretation of the mill and the gold discovery site, contrary to the park's purpose and the goals of its general plan.

Use of Public Funds:

A \$1.9 million capital outlay project currently proposes to reconstruct the mill using bond funds from Proposition 84. Private sources of funds are not available for this project. The local cooperative association has limited fundraising capacity, as do fraternal organizations that celebrate the Gold Rush, such as the Native Sons of the Golden West or E Clampus Vitus. Only by using public funds can the reconstruction of the saw mill be accomplished.

State Parks believes that the Commission's 1979 action was in response to the ambitious mill relocation proposal envisioned at that time and the commissioners' concerns regarding

the difficulty and expense of modifying the American River channel and building and maintaining Sutter's Mill within the river's banks. The Commission's reluctance to spend public money for the extensive removal, relocation, and reconstruction of the then-new sawmill is understandable and in 1979 would not have been in the best public or fiscal interest. Today, there is consensus among park staff and the public that this project should go forward using public funds.

VI. LEGAL ISSUES

There are no known legal issues relating to the Commission's approval of the General Plan Amendment for Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park.

VII. FISCAL IMPACT

There is no immediate fiscal impact as a result of adoption of the proposed general plan amendment, other than the \$1.9 million planning and construction costs if and when the sawmill project proceeds. Long-term maintenance and repair costs would continue to increase if State Parks is required to maintain the old mill structure rather than construct a new one.

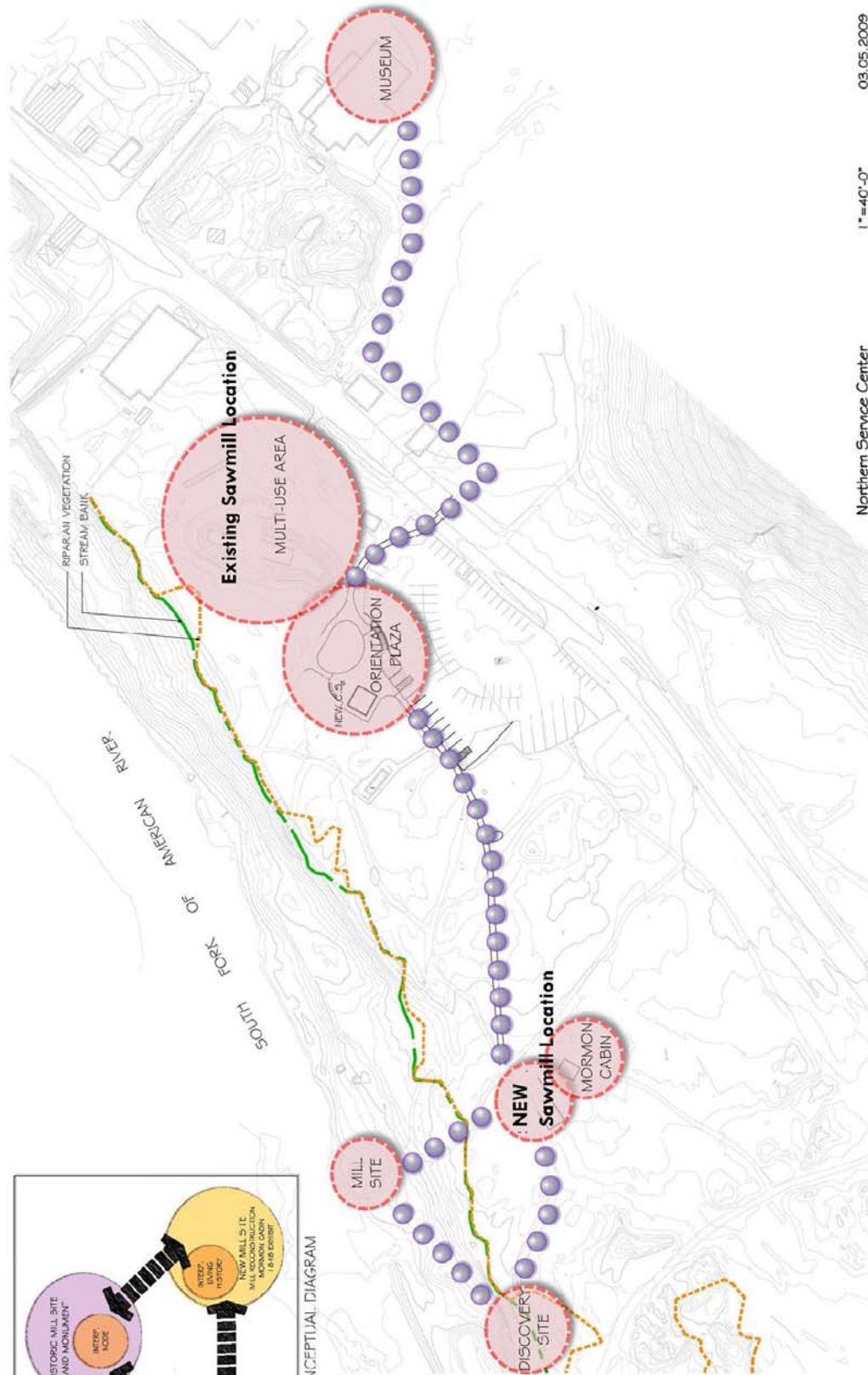
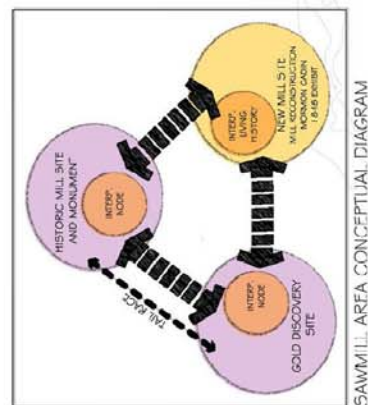
ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Map depicting the site of the current and proposed sawmills, as they relate to the river and original location of the gold discovery site.

Attachment B: Commission Resolution 23-79, for approval of 1979 Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park General Plan



MARSHALL GOLD DISCOVERY STATE HISTORIC PARK



03.05.2009

1"=40'-0"

Northern Service Center

Attachment B

STATE OF CALIFORNIA—RESOURCES AGENCY

Edmund G. Brown Jr., Governor

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

STATE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

P. O. BOX 2390, SACRAMENTO 95811



Resolution 23 - 79
Resolution adopted by the
CALIFORNIA PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION
at its regular meeting in Sacramento
April 20, 1979

WHEREAS the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation has presented to this Commission for approval the proposed General Plan for Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park; and

WHEREAS this reflects the long-range development plan as to provide for the optimum use and enjoyment of the unit as well as the protection of its quality;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the State Park and Recreation Commission approves the Department of Parks and Recreation's General Plan for Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park, preliminary dated November 1978, subject to the following modifications:

1. In Phase One, major interpretive concerns shall be with Gold Discovery Area.
2. Restoration of Coloma townsite will be Phase II or later.
3. Reconstruction of the 1847-48 mining camp scene should be in Phase I along with Gold Discovery Interpretation.
4. Public money shall not be expended on the relocation of Sutters Mill.
5. Emphasis and support to realignment of Highway 49;

and subject to such environmental changes as the Director of Parks and Recreation shall determine advisable and necessary to implement carrying out the provisions and objectives of said plan.